



1862: Battle between U.S.S. Monitor and C.S.S. Virginia.

Copyright 1995 by Grolier Electronic Publishing, Inc.

#### Monitor and Merrimack

The U.S. Civil War battle between two ironclad warships, the U.S.S. Monitor and the converted steam frigate Merrimack, fought at Hampton Roads, Va., on Mar. 9, 1862, marked the end of the age of sail-driven, wooden-hulled warships. In 1861, as they withdrew from Norfolk at the beginning of the war, the Union forces had scuttled the U.S.S. Merrimack. The Confederates raised the abandoned ship, added a ram to its bow, stripped the superstructure of sail and rigging, and placed a protective, sloped iron casemate over the hull and deck. With this ironclad, renamed the C.S.S. Virginia, the South intended to break the Union's strangling blockade of the Southern coast by wooden warships. To meet the threat, John ERICSSON designed and built the Monitor, an all-iron steam-driven vessel with a single turret housing two guns.

Neither ship proved able to destroy the other, but the tactical stalemate was a strategic victory for the North. By its presence, the Monitor prevented the Virginia from dispersing the Union blockaders. (Unable to retreat up the James River from Norfolk, the Virginia was destroyed by the Confederates on May 10, 1862.) The Union built many Monitor-type vessels, but the Confederacy lacked the industrial capacity necessary for large-scale construction of blockade-breaking ironclads. On Dec. 31, 1862, the unseaworthy Monitor foundered off Cape Hatteras, N.C. The ship was rediscovered by underwater archaeologists in 1973, in too fragile a condition to be raised. Its 590 kg (1,300 lb) anchor was recovered in 1983.

Kenneth J. Hagan

Bibliography: Davis, William C., *Duel Between the First Iron-clads* (1975); Hoehling, Adolph A., *Thunder at Hampton Roads* (1976); Hunter, A.F., *A Year on the Monitor and the Destruction of Fort Sumter*, ed. by C. Symons and W. Stall (1987).